

HOUSE & GARDEN[®]

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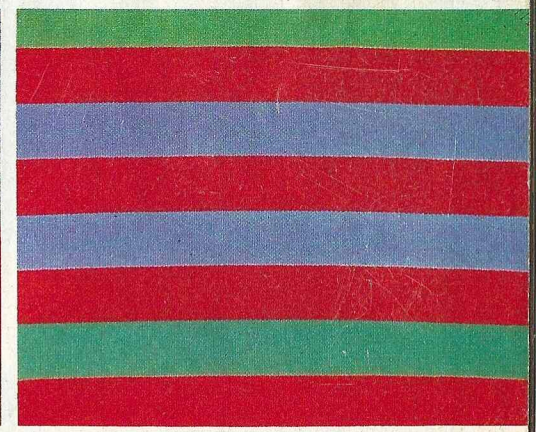
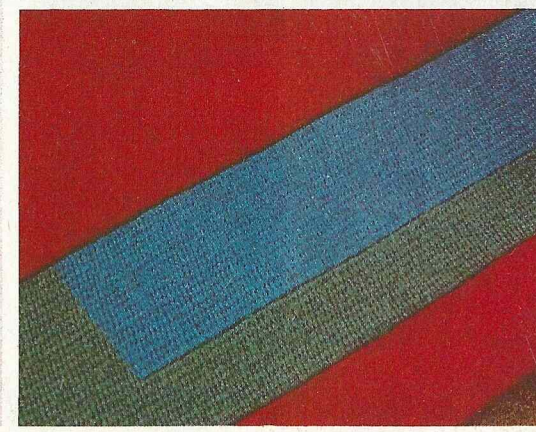
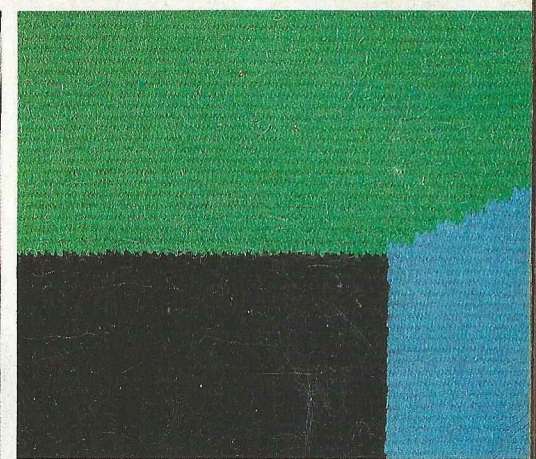
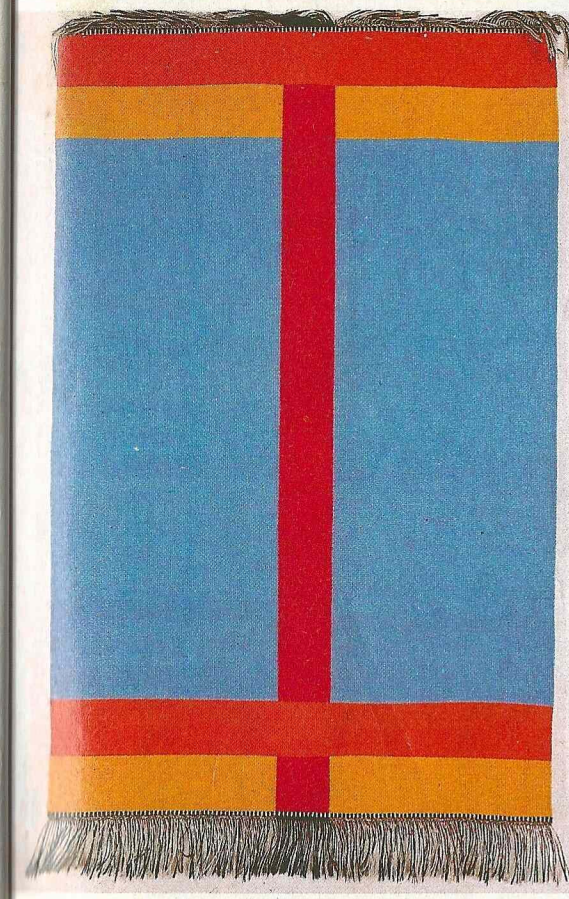
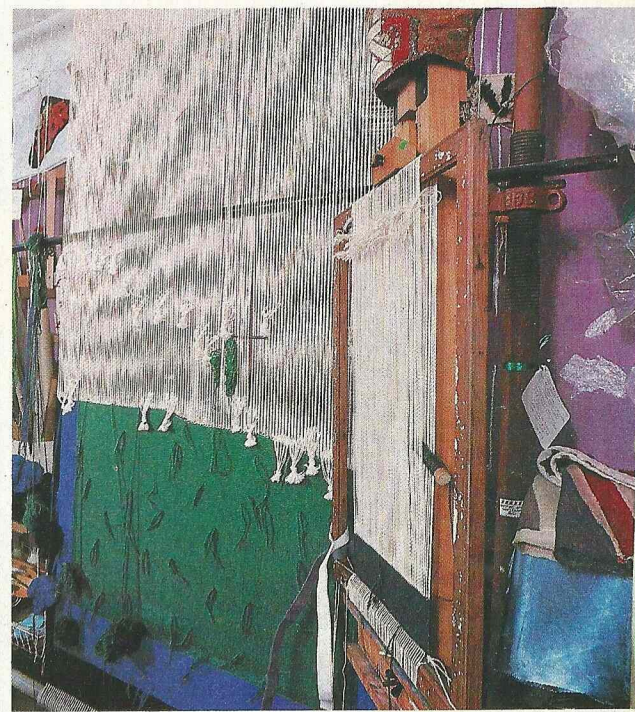
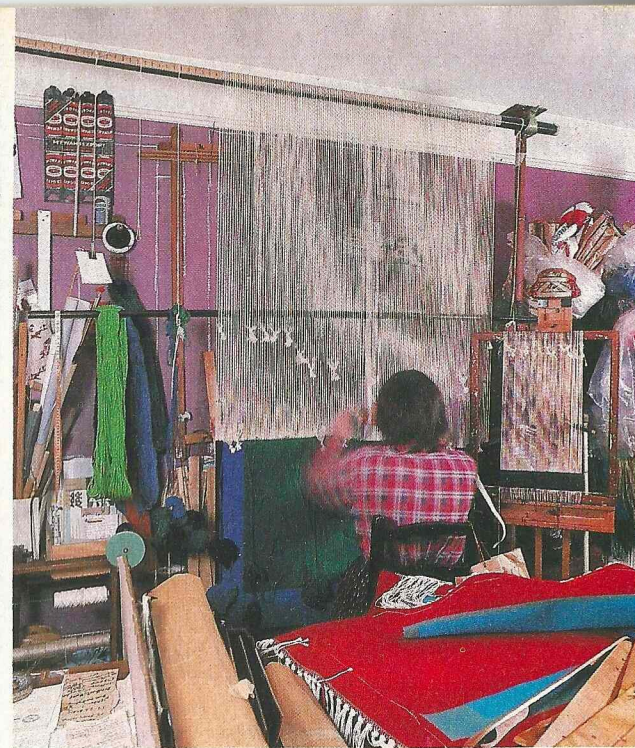
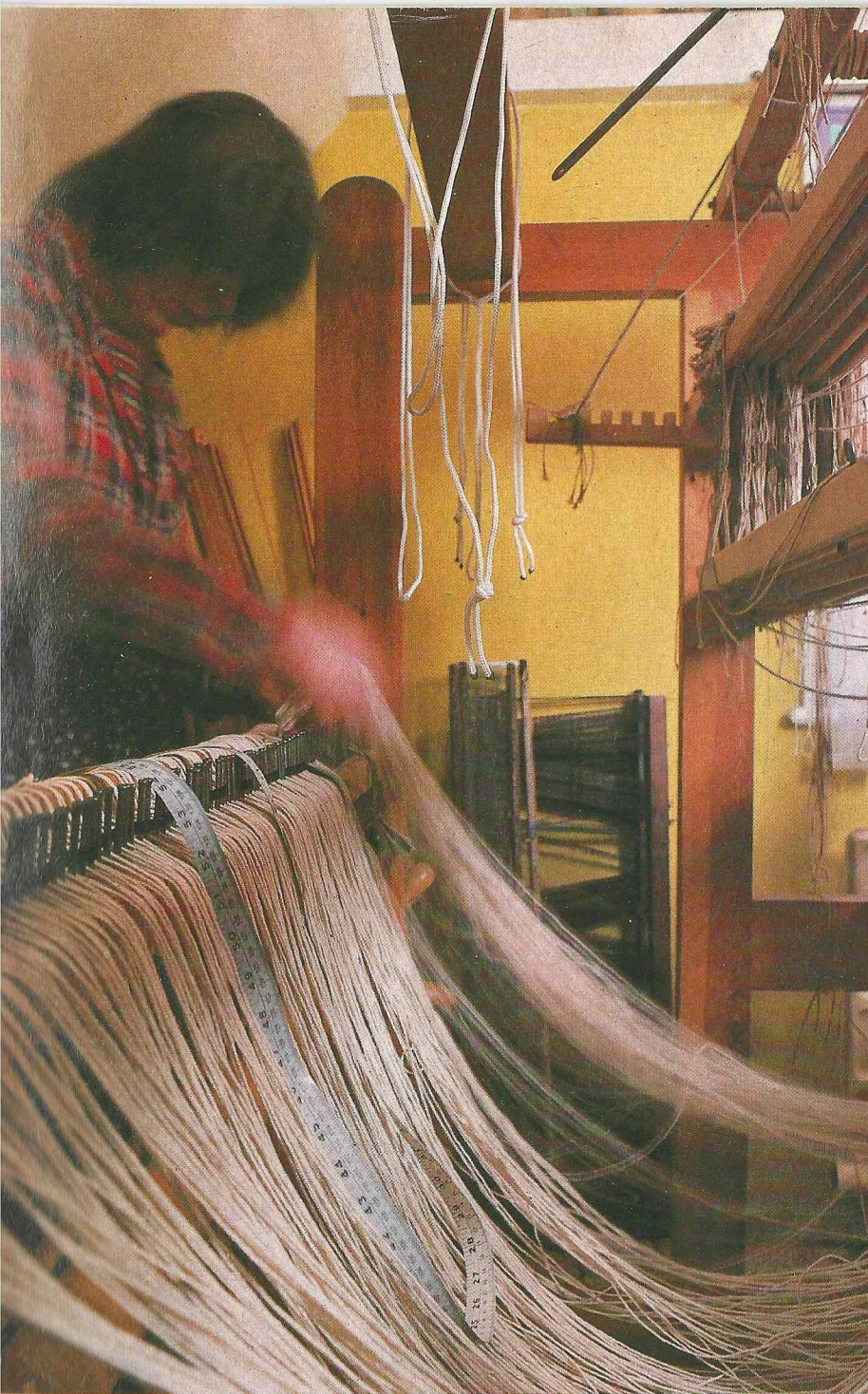


**The discreet charm
of the open fireplace**

Spiral staircases

Two Art Nouveau houses

Wine in art



PEOPLE

The artist who turned to rugs and tapestries

PHOTOGRAPHS BY DUNCAN McNEILL

THE BRILLIANT geometrics shown on the opposite page are typical of the tapestries and rugs woven in the Guildford workshop of Mary Farmer, one of the most dedicated, prolific and successful of freelance weavers in this country.

Mary Farmer was born at Newbury in Berkshire and studied painting at the Beckenham School of Art in Kent. She has never stopped painting since. But she was also fascinated by the disciplines of a craft, and, after a spell in a workshop, where she acquired the rudiments of weaving, the

potentials of a new medium became apparent. The large scale of rugs for the floor was the initial attraction plus the effects upon a work when seen horizontally and from constantly changing angles. She therefore took some part-time courses in spinning and dyeing at two other art schools.

After accumulating enough work to start exhibiting, she rented studio space for several years at Digswell House, an Arts Trust in Hertfordshire, where she became a freelance weaver. She was making contacts with potential

clients and her work was beginning to sell.

Making a name for herself was a hard slog: but gradually she began to build up a steady stream of commissions and was able to be more selective in the commissions she accepted. She was also steadily evolving her own unique style. For some years she used a variety of weaving techniques in the rugs, but eventually moved into a period in which she used plain weave and tapestry methods almost exclusively, finding that these gave her the flexibility she needed. This led,

inevitably, to a far greater number of tapestries. 'The smaller tapestries tend to have more positive movement in them, with active elements such as contrasting yarns, which are subject to dramatic changes caused by variations in direction and modulations of light as it hits the surface. The larger pieces depend more on the juxtapositions of colour in themselves to convey ambiguities and illusions in space. They are pieces which require the viewer to contemplate and to be drawn into them and will give surprises and adaptations in perception to maintain interest. They will adapt to various kinds of environment and take on different characteristics according to their situation.'

Even from her earliest essays she was determined to keep sufficient time free to follow her own experimental work and to keep new ideas burgeoning. Then

there is the human side of the craft: the wish to establish a rapport with clients without jeopardizing her understandable wish for self-expression.

Yet, as she got to know her clients better, she discovered that the discipline of working to their commissions sparked off an intriguing balance between her own aesthetic views and their practical needs and this relationship has continued. She visits sitting-room or council chamber with her dye samples to establish suitable colour ranges for the given light, showing examples to determine a particular weave, making colour and written notes and discussing the requirements of the client before working on various solutions and presenting the final design for approval.

She approaches tapestries and rugs in much the same way that she would tackle a painting. Each

is an attempt to solve a visual problem and to express the artist's ideas. The major differences lie in texture and construction. 'In weaving, the image goes right through the work and is not superimposed, and, above all, invites being touched. These are immensely important considerations in the work.'

She uses the best quality wool, frequently imported from Sweden. Such wools are imperative, she emphasizes, for their resilience, exceptional durability, resistance to dirt and purity of colour. Dyes thoroughly penetrate such yarn which becomes saturated with colour, thus providing a depth and richness of tone quite different from colour applied to a surface.

She reckons she spends at least half her working time in designing, drawing and painting, which she still regards as the fundamental basis of her work ●

